



Lynn Schindler

4th District State Representative

2004 Opening Session Report

Rep. Lynn Schindler

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Committees:

- Local Government,
Ranking Republican member
- Commerce and Labor
- Task Force on Health Care
Reinsurance

Dear friends,

The 2004 Legislative session is underway, and we are already deeply involved in addressing issues important to the people of Washington and the 4th District.

One of my top priorities this session will be continuing to **ease our state's regulatory burden** that is stifling job creation. Last year we moved in that direction, but still have a long way to go to create an environment where we fully support existing employers and new investment can flourish. That's why this session I will push for more changes that will make Washington's regulatory environment less costly and cumbersome, and make us more attractive to job providers.

This session I will also focus on finding legislative **solutions to local challenges**, such as cutting regulations that are driving up the costs of housing, and allowing people to vote on changes to their water-sewer district.

Please don't hesitate to contact me during the legislative session to let me know your thoughts on issues before the Legislature. And, if you are having difficulty with a state agency and would like assistance, please let me know. **I am here to serve you.**

Sincerely,

Rep. Lynn Schindler

February 2004

Representative *Lynn* Schindler

Improving Washington's Business Climate

Late last year, Boeing announced it will conduct its 7E7 final assembly in Everett. While it would have been nice to see Eastern Washington get the project, it's still good news that Boeing chose a site in Washington.

Equally as important, though, was what the 7E7 competition did for families and small businesses all across Washington. The urgency of the project last year gave the Legislature leverage to enact reforms we've needed for a long time – changes that helped all employers.

But we must not be complacent, because our work is not done. This session House Republicans are putting the entire **worker's compensation system** – including why rates are up nearly 39 percent in just two years – under the microscope.

We are also looking at ways to slow our state's ballooning **minimum wage requirements** – the highest in the nation, as well as taking steps to rein in **over-burdensome regulations** and the agencies that impose them. This includes limiting state agencies' rule-making ability to situations where they are specifically authorized to do so. All of these proposals would position our state for a strong and quick economic recovery, and **create needed jobs and prosperity for families**.

State Spending: It's Time to Tighten our Belts

Washington's budget is figured on two-year cycles, and 2004 is an "off year" for the budget. However, this year we are still required to examine changing demands (i.e., school enrollments) and make mid-course corrections. Last session we approved a budget with **no general tax increases** that protected our most pressing priorities. Unfortunately, last month Gov. Locke proposed a mid-course budget that, in my opinion, abandons the fiscal restraint shown last year and takes us back to the days of unsound budget policies. The governor's 2004 budget proposal:

- Increases spending by \$193 million (net) for 2003-05
- Relies on \$158 million in one-time revenues for ongoing expenditures
- Spends down our state's reserves from \$544 million to just \$172 million, leaving taxpayers virtually unprotected against economic swings and unanticipated needs

These unsound fiscal policies are unacceptable, and I will not support a mid-course budget that includes *any* new taxes or fees that create additional hardships for families or employers. Instead, we must continue the work begun last year and show citizens they can trust the Legislature to show fiscal restraint.

Reforming our Liability System

Many people think of tort reform in terms of the medical industry. And it's no wonder: escalating medical malpractice premiums are forcing many health care providers to close their doors. But the same holds true for almost every other industry. Employers everywhere are **struggling to pay skyrocketing premiums** to protect themselves against lawsuits.

Because this problem is affecting so many people, there is rising public support for sensible liability reform that puts limits on non-economic damages (those not directly related to the injury). The Liability Reform Coalition (LRC), a broad coalition of businesses, local governments, health care professionals, non-profits and others committed to reasonable **tort reform**, recently commissioned a study of Washington voters by two independent research firms. The findings were significant. Fully 75 percent of those surveyed believe awards for non-economic damages are excessive, and 72 percent support limiting them. Nearly 60 percent believe personal injury lawsuits are hurting the economy and making Washington a less attractive place to do business.

Last year the Senate passed, but the House Democrat leadership refused to consider, tort reform measures that would have **reined in out-of-control lawsuits**. I remain committed to pushing for those much-needed reforms this session.

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Are Your Medical Premiums Skyrocketing?

Sixty-seven percent of Washingtonians work for small businesses, but many people can't get health coverage because it's too expensive for their employers. Why? Because there are too many government rules telling health insurers what they must include in their plans. Not every person needs a "Cadillac" plan, but everyone does need reliable, affordable coverage that provides care when they are sick. Last year House Republicans proposed a bill that would have **reduced these costly, government-imposed mandates** and given employers **more flexibility** to offer affordable, basic health coverage for working families. House Democrat leadership stopped the bill, but we are bringing the idea forward again in 2004.

Addressing Issues Important to the 4th District

I am proposing several bills this year to help people right here in the 4th Legislative District. Here are a few of them:

- **Making homes affordable.** Taxes, fees and regulations are increasing home prices, squeezing many families and first-time home buyers out of the market. Last session I championed a package of legislation aimed at reducing red tape and lowering the cost of housing. Although the bills did not pass, I am again advocating this approach to help people achieve their dreams of homeownership.
- **Giving water-sewer district ratepayers a chance to decide their own fate.** Today, many water-sewer district customers don't have a say when a city wants to take over their system – even though it could result in price increases and other significant changes. Instead, individuals can initiate the switch by signature petition. I am sponsoring a bill that would require cities seeking to acquire systems serving 5,000+ residents to fund an election asking *all* ratepayers their opinion. Citizens are savvy about their services, and if local government can do a better job, it will get people's business.
- **Maintaining property rights.** Today the government can condemn and take private property and then – rather than use it for a public purpose, such as a road – sell it to a non-governmental, private owner (such as a business that generates far more revenue). This year I introduced a bill to disallow this practice. I am also supporting legislation requiring local governments to compensate homeowners, dollar for dollar, when they devalue a property by 25 percent or more due to increased regulations. For example, if government declared part of a property a wetland and the value was cut in half, the property owner could suspend his or her property taxes (over several years) until their savings totaled the amount of the devalued property.

The 2004 legislative session: Get involved!

Information about the 2004 legislative session is as close as your keyboard and your television. There are plenty of ways to get involved and stay informed on issues important to you.

Information on the Internet:

State government:

www.access.wa.gov

Legislative information:

www.hrc.leg.wa.gov

Understanding the legislative process:

- Go to the House of Representative's web site:
www.leg.wa.gov/house/
- Click on "General Info"
- There you will find the "Guide to Effective Legislative Participation" and information about the law-making process

Best way to check the status of bills:

- Go to the Legislature's web site: www.leg.wa.gov
- Click on "Bill Info"
- There you will find a host of information relating to each bill passing through the Legislature

Other ways to get information and assistance:

I would be happy to speak to your group, organization or school. Topics might include:

- Issues before the Legislature
- How does the legislative process work?
- What it's like to be a legislator
- Issues specific to the 4th legislative district

Watch TVW.

TVW (TV Washington), a non-profit public affairs network, broadcasts the Legislature on cable TV throughout the state. Call TVW for programming information at (360) 586-5555, or visit TVW's website at www.tvw.org.

Ask for assistance.

Legislators are elected not only to represent you, but also to serve you. If you are facing challenges working with a state agency, please contact me for help.

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